

NCHE News

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

RADICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

The list is not endless, but it grows longer by the day: public/private partnerships; expanding role of technology in the classroom; influences of philanthropy; outcome and assessment measures; growing contingent workers, decline of full-time faculty and staff; continued defunding of public higher education; growth of for-profit institutions, and federalizing of accreditation e.g. credit hours.

Overlay this sampling of challenges with what has happened in the last four weeks in Wisconsin with the stripping away of collective bargaining rights for public sector employees along with numerous states in the queue with pending legislation against pensions, dues

deduction, and agency fee, and you can see that public education, collective bargaining, and unions are faced with unprecedented attacks.

NEA has been tracking proposed state legislation since November, and the profile of states looks as follows: 20—collective bargaining challenges; 25—elimination of payroll deduction; 12—right to work; 13—elimination of due process; 22—voucher bills; 10—parent trigger bills, and 49—pension challenges.

The choice is evident. Last December, John Stocks, incoming NEA Executive Director, intoned that “we are at war.” If we do not transform ourselves and operate differently than we currently do, we ensure our demise. Our future is in jeopardy.” The NEA board has already approved a change in the strategic goals and recommended increased funding to finance the plan.

President Dennis Van Roekel has detailed changes in our offense and defense: continue transforming education, bring new strength and vigor to our affiliates, fund more research than ever before, and know where we want to be in three years: larger, stronger, and better organized.

Finally, the estimated five percent decline in NEA membership and subsequent cuts in the 2011-2012 NEA Budget are necessary to support the NEA outcomes. So much for the causes of “Radical Transformations.”

For many of our members, teaching in the classroom can be an isolated activity behind a closed door. We need to step out, join one another, PreK to G, engage, and collectively work as one cohesive unit.

I hope you find a push from our upcoming Higher Education Conference that will send you back to your campuses armed with the realization that, like Wisconsin, all NEA affiliates need to stand united so that we are never divided. The script is easy; “Did you know...?” Continue to keep us informed by phone 508-854-4336 or email NCHE@nea.org

NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP STRATEGY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

In the fall of 2009, the NEA Executive Committee adopted a PreK-12 national membership organizing strategy. That report incorporated a recommendation that the NEA Executive Committee adopt an organizing strategy for higher education as well.

This past fall, a Task Force was established, and it met to develop recommendations for the Executive Committee. Once drafted, the Membership Organizing Department staff met with the higher education members of the Advisory Committee on Membership (ACM) seeking its input. The Task Force recommendation was completed in February 2011, and it was sent to the Executive Committee.

This is probably the first time that NEA has developed an organizing strategy for higher education separate from preK-12. With declining membership in K-12 and ESP, this recommendation is timely since possibilities abound to increase higher education membership.

THE ASH WEDNESDAY MASSACRE

I just left the capitol, which is under occupation by 4,000 protesters.

Workers and students mobilized quickly when we got the word that the Senate and Assembly Republicans called a hastily organized conference committee to strip out the anti-union (non-fiscal) provision of Governor Walker's Budget Adjustment Bill.

Dan Burkhalter WEAC ED, Kurt Kobelt, WEAC GC and I rushed to the capitol to observe the action in the Senate Parlor.

We were denied entrance to the Senate chamber area by the State Patrol which resulted in a heated argument with the sergeant in charge. I was hot!

John Grabel, AFSCME Legislative Director, got Senator Miller's staff to come down and escort us into the Senate area.

Before leaving our offices, we alerted the press and our field program to mobilize members to the capitol. Crowds started to gather outside the Senate Parlor windows.

The Senate Parlor was packed with news cameras.

We were the only union representatives there. (See my Twitter feed)

We observed what I am now calling the Ash Wednesday Massacre.

Remember the Senate Democrats are still in Illinois.

Democratic Assembly Leader, Peter Barca, asked for an explanation of the conference report from the non-partisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau staff and was denied by Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald.

Over Democratic Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca's objections to lack of notification violating Wisconsin's open meetings law, the conference committee called the roll and voted the bill out of committee.

The Senate quickly went to the floor and passed the legislation 18-1. Senator Dale Schultz (R-17) voted against the bill. He needs to be thanked profusely for choosing principle over politics. The Democrats had scrambled to come home but turned back due to distance from the capitol.

As we have known all along and was confirmed tonight, this vote exposed the big lie perpetrated by Governor Walker. This has nothing to do with the fiscal challenges facing the state of Wisconsin. It is about taking away worker's rights and busting their unions.

I facilitated an emergency meeting of the labor leaders, and we decided to have Phil Neuenfeldt speak to the crowd outside the capitol.

The State Patrol, now run by Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald's father, opened the doors of the capitol letting all the protesters inside in hopes of creating a bad-news story for the movement, since it is under court order to be vacated at night. There were no police inside, which raised everyone's suspicions that this was a set-up. We suspect there may be arrests tonight.

Phil, John Grabel, Marty Beil, Bruce Colburn and I pushed through the crowd. I secured the bullhorn from one of the demonstrators. Phil spoke eloquently to our anger and outrage, to our solidarity, and to our commitment to non-violent action. He announced a large rally tomorrow at 9 a.m. and our already planned large rally on Saturday @ 3pm. He emphasized the recall imperative.

Pass the word about Saturday imperative.

Demonstrators started a sit-in in the foyer of the Assembly blocking the entrances.

Bruce Colburn, VP of SEIU and I went to the Assembly chamber and spoke to the sit-in protesters and urged them to consider other actions (e.g. recalling the Senators) as the next battleground in the movement. Our words were welcomed but not persuasive. They are determined to occupy the Assembly chamber in attempt to block the vote tomorrow.

I am still outside the capitol. Over 4,000 people have occupied the rotunda and approximately 200 protesters have blocked access to the Assembly chambers where a vote on the conference report is scheduled for tomorrow @ 11am CST.

I want to express my deepest appreciation and heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you who has been working so hard to support us in this struggle.

Cars are circling the capitol beeping their horns in unison with the crowds' favorite chant, "This is what democracy looks like."

This is not the end. It is only the beginning of a long struggle for workers' rights and their unions. Now we escalate the fight.

Do not lose faith. Do not lose hope. Our organization is rooted in great struggles like this one. In the darkest times of the struggle, there is always light. Light that you kindle each and every day with your commitment and dedication. Your sweat and your tears.

Say a prayer tonight for the workers of Wisconsin. They will persevere and be victorious. This is a long struggle which will have its highs and lows but remember, it is a just cause and they are counting on you more than ever.

The cars continue to encircle the capitol at this late hour and the crowd in the capitol is determined not to leave.

I am so grateful for each and every one of you.

Thank you and solidarity!

Written from the "front line" at 1:17 a.m. Thursday, March 10, 2011, by NEA Incoming Executive Director John Stocks who is from Wisconsin.

NEA BENEFITS AGREES TO MORATORIUM ON FOR-PROFITS

As a result of concerns having been raised about NEA Member Benefits and the NEA Academy offering degree programs in partnership with three universities, one of which is a for-profit, NEA Benefits agreed to a moratorium on establishing additional partnerships while NEA policies are revised and clarified.

President Van Roekel established a Task Force named Vice President Lily Eskelsen its chair. The Task Force's charge shall be to:

Review NEA's policies on for-profit adult education and provide its rationale for whether and to what extent NEA should support degree programs offered by for-profit colleges and universities. The task force will deliver its final report and recommendations to the NEA President by February 1, 2012.

The Task Force will meet during Super Weeks. The Task Force met for the first time during the February 2011 Super Week.

NEA BOARD RECOMMENDS \$10 INCREASE TO BALLOT INITIATIVE FUND

The NEA dues are based on the national average of teacher's salary. Because of a decrease in that national average, NEA's proposed budget increase of \$4 for 2011-2012 could not go forward without a constitutional amendment. The dues increase will now be \$2 for active and zero for ESP members. As a result of this unexpected change and the seismic shift after the elections, the Executive Committee evaluated its options.

The Executive Committee initially recommended that a \$3 assessment be directed to the Ballot Initiative Fund. Before the February NEA Board meeting, the Executive Committee re-evaluated its recommendation with the realization that states are going to need some serious financial support; it brought forth a \$10 increase instead.

This Ballot/Legislative Initiative Fund was established about ten years ago, and \$10 of active members' dues goes to this fund each year. Because of the sweeping changes in state legislatures and congress since the election (we lost 680 pro-education legislators across the country), and the flipping of states from blue to red, in whole or in part (Wisconsin, for example), states are facing unprecedented attacks on collective bargaining rights, pensions, accountability, etc.

After a lengthy debate, the Board voted to recommend to the Representative Assembly a \$10 increase to the Ballot Initiative Fund, that would sunset in five years.

CONSTITUENT RELATION DEPARTMENT HOSTS A STRATEGIC DISCUSSION

On March 7 and 8, 2011, the Constituent Relations Department brought together the National Council of Urban Educators Association (NCUEA), the NCHE and the student and retired caucuses for a strategic discussion. Presenters included President Van Roekel, Secretary Becky Pringle, Executive Director John Wilson, and Sheila Simmons from the Priority Schools Campaign. Discussions among the participants focused on their roles in the issues NEA is facing, the significant change in the Associations' landscape as a result of the recent elections, and the impact



NCHE Executive Committee Members: L-R Catherine Leisek, FL; Cynthia Schneider, MI; Jim Rice, NCHE President; Beverly Stewart, IL; Cathy Boudreau, MA.

on the financial state of the NEA. Though NCHE's participation in these discussions were based on its caucus status, higher education's role in Constituent Relations is different from the other three other caucuses, since the membership category of higher education falls in Constituent Relations that oversees all aspects of NEA's representation of higher education members and organizing efforts.

It is unclear if the Task Force will meet again to continue these discussions.

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